



# **Finding the Best and the Brightest: A Guide to Recruiting, Selecting, and Retaining Effective Leaders**

*Peg Thoms*

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# Finding the Best and the Brightest: A Guide to Recruiting, Selecting, and Retaining Effective Leaders


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*Finding the Best and Brightest* proposes an approach to choosing leaders based on a set of criteria designed to align individual qualities with organizational or institutional goals. Peg Thoms challenges the popular trend in theory and practice toward transformational or visionary leadership, arguing instead that leadership must be developed in context; many organizations, for example, don't need visionaries as much as they need operational leaders, who get things done by focusing on present-day tasks, such as designing superior products and delivering exceptional customer service. This book provides guidance for how to recruit, select, and retain the right people for leadership positions at any level of the organization. Drawing from research conducted in the private, public, and non-profit sectors, Thoms features powerful examples of effective and ineffective leadership in a variety of situations, and sheds light on the complex relationships between leaders and those who follow them.

We all choose our leaders. We hire them to run our companies. We vote them into office. We appoint them to committees. We decide to work for, serve, and follow them. In fact, all leadership is relative; by taking direction or orders, going to bat or war, marching behind, listening, and agreeing, we are choosing to allow another individual to lead us. Whether the stage is a corporation, a country, a club, a school, or any other organization, effective leaders matter. Yet despite such high-profile examples of leadership disasters—from the California recall of Gray Davis to the fall of such business titans as Ken Lay and Sam Waksal—we continue to choose, hire, and elect poor leaders.

*Finding the Best and Brightest* explores this phenomenon in business, politics, and other sectors of society, and proposes an antidote—an approach to choosing leaders based on a set of criteria designed to align individual qualities with organizational or institutional goals. Peg Thoms challenges the popular trend toward transformational leadership, which focuses on identifying universal characteristics, arguing instead that leadership must be developed in context. Many organizations, for example, need operational leaders who can focus on present-day tasks, such as designing superior products and delivering exceptional customer service, and not inspirational or visionary leaders, whose otherwise admirable qualities might be ill-suited to the challenges at hand. Outlining six typical leadership search scenarios—from school principal to hospital CEO—Thoms shows readers how to identify the traits and behaviors that are most essential for the position and how to structure interviews and other search techniques to elicit the most informative responses and home in on the best candidates. She also reminds us that many organizations fail not because they can't find good leaders but because they can't keep them, and offers strategies to promote leadership development. Whether you are an executive giving the nod to a new department head, a concerned citizen casting your vote for a municipal councilman, a club member choosing a new president, or an aspiring leader deciding which offer will provide the greatest growth opportunities, *Finding the Best and the Brightest* offers fresh insights on the dynamic relationship between leaders and those who follow them.

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